



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



NOMINATIONS FOR FALLEN HERO BRIDGE DEDICATIONS DUE APRIL 1

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs is accepting nominations for South Dakota's "Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication" program.

South Dakota has dedicated 18 bridges honoring 21 heroes since dedications started in 2019. To learn more about the program and to view stories on bridge honorees, visit the Bridge Dedications page on the SDDVA website: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/Fallen%20Hero%20Bridge%20Dedications/Bridge%20Heroes.aspx>.

In 2022, South Dakota will dedicate six more state bridges in honor of fallen heroes that died while serving in combat or are classified as missing in action. More than 3,000 South Dakotans have made the ultimate sacrifice. To view the list of South Dakota casualties by county, visit the page listing South Dakota War Casualties by County on the SDDVA website: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/War%20Casualties%20by%20County.aspx>

Naming South Dakota bridges in memory of our fallen gives us an opportunity for remembrance, reflection, and respect – honoring the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. They cherished liberty and loved freedom enough to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life.

The family of fallen hero Greg Wagner expressed their appreciation for the bridge dedication program in 2021. Wagner's brother Dan said, "We are infinitely appreciative and thankful for the honor bestowed on us by Governor Kristi Noem and the Department of Veterans Affairs in honoring our hero." "South Dakota's fallen hero bridge dedication is wonderful and with the naming of the bridge over the James River on SD Highway 38, we now have another way to keep our hero's memories alive."

Nominations are due by April 1 to the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs with all supporting documentation attached. The simple, online form is available on the Bridge Dedications page on the SDDVA website at:

<https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/Fallen%20Hero%20Bridge%20Dedications/SDDOM%20SDDVA%20Bridge%20Naming%20Application.pdf>.

Nominators are encouraged to indicate their preferred state bridge site for their respective hero.

VVA Chapter 1054 Recognition ...	2
Brookings Veterans Coffee	3
Warrant Officer Candidates	4
Guardian Project.....	5
VA Rating Schedule.....	6
Congressman Johnson Visit	7
MJFSVH Update	8
Stand Up for Women Veterans....	9
Drop-In Legal Clinic.....	10
VA Spiritual Support Group.....	11
SDDVA Upcoming Events.....	12

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA CHAPTER 1054 RECOGNIZED IN BOTH CHAMBERS OF THE SD LEGISLATURE

The South Dakota House of Representatives and Senate, both recognized the Vietnam Veterans of American Chapter 1054 in their opening session Wednesday afternoon, February 16.

Representative Nancy York introduced House Commemoration 8002 commending and honoring them for their philanthropy, military funeral honors, flag donations, and honoring healthcare workers. Senator Larry Zikmund highlighted all the great things this Chapter has done in their region and throughout the State.

The Chapter is the twelfth largest of the six hundred and fifty active chapters in the United States, with more than five hundred veteran members and over seventy associate members.



VETERANS COFFEE

Brookings County Veterans Service Officer Courtney VanZanten was busy hosting outreach events this week in Brookings.

During her “coffee with veterans” at the Kool Beans Coffee Shop in Brookings, and on the South Dakota State University campus, VanZanten had presentations by Jay Hunter and Grant Dorothy from the VA Whole Health program.



VanZanten and SDDVA Field Service Officer Brett Dickerson were on hand to answer questions veterans had regarding their benefits.



WARRANT OFFICER CANDIDATES CONTINUE LONG- STANDING TRADITION

Members of South Dakota Army National Guard's Warrant Officer Candidate School class 22-001 gathered to present their class song and sign to the state command chief warrant officer, Feb. 5, at Fort Meade.

The song and sign presentation is a tradition with the Warrant Officer Cohort and builds esprit de corps within the class and facilitates communication among the candidates.

"The sign and song presentation is a long-standing tradition in Warrant Officer Candidate School, both at Fort Rucker and at Regional Training Institutes around the country," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Kylan Harrington, 196th Regional Training Institute senior training, advising and counseling officer. "It signifies the class coming together and taking pride in their actions as a team as opposed to being individuals."

The class worked together throughout the course to come up with a unique sign and song that depicts the classes' journey together.

Warrant Officer Candidate School is a truly unique school for a select group of individuals. Warrant officers make up only three percent of the total Army force.

Warrant officers are experts in their field and advise their units on every aspect of the subject area they have mastered over their military career.

Becoming a warrant officer can expand a soldier's opportunities professionally. They could potentially become a member of an elite group of experts, developing themselves and leading others.

"Many warrant officers attend specialty schools in their career fields which, in turn, increases civilian job opportunities," said Harrington. "Attending Warrant Officer Candidate School will challenge you physically and mentally, but you grow tremendously as a leader and as a soldier in the Guard during your time there."

If any soldier is considering the warrant officer career path, Harrington says they shouldn't hesitate to reach out. "We are happy to answer any questions or concerns you might have," he said.

For more information on becoming a warrant officer, contact Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brenda Laurenti at (605) 737-6230 or brenda.l.laurenti2.mil@army.mil.





JOIN US FOR THE GUARDIAN PROJECT

SERVING POST-9/11 VETERANS
DEALING WITH MENTAL TRAUMA AS A
RESULT OF THEIR SERVICE

The Guardian Project takes groups of no more than 12 veterans on remote outdoor excursions with the goal of improving mental and physical well-being for those battling PTS (including MST).

Veterans with severe injuries are welcomed and all levels of fitness are accepted. We'll help you find the right trip for your skill level.

WHERE? UTAH, WYOMING, AND COLORADO

WHEN? ONE WEEK EXCURSIONS IN JUNE, JULY, AUGUST, AND OCTOBER

COST? FREE - TRANSPORTATION INCLUDED

REQUIREMENTS

- Post-9/11 veteran
- Active Duty, Retired, or Honorably Discharged
- Experienced trauma as a result of your service

LEARN MORE AT

WWW.WHITEHEART.ORG/GUARDIANPROJECT



WHITE WATER RAFTING | HORSEBACK RIDING | ROCK CLIMBING

APPLY



VA PROPOSES UPDATES TO RATING SCHEDULE FOR RESPIRATORY, AUDITORY AND MENTAL DISORDERS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs is proposing changes to the [VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities](#) specifically pertaining to the respiratory, auditory, and mental disorders body systems.

The proposed updates to the rating schedule for these conditions will enable VA to incorporate modern medical data and terminology to provide veterans with more accurate and consistent decisions.

“Veterans who currently receive compensation for a service-connected condition in these body systems will not have their disability rating impacted when the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities is updated,” said Thomas Murphy, Northeast district director, performing the delegable duties of the undersecretary for benefits. “Updating the rating schedule allows veterans to receive decisions based on the most current medical knowledge relating to their condition.”

By incorporating modern medical data in the assessment of disabilities and how they impact earning capacity, veterans will receive evaluations which more accurately compensate them for their service-connected disabilities. Proposed updates include:

- Modernizing the evaluative rating criteria for sleep apnea, using developments in medical knowledge to evaluate it based on its responsiveness to treatment, bringing the rating criteria for sleep apnea more closely in line with the stated purpose of the rating schedule.
- Evaluating tinnitus (ringing in the ears) as a symptom of the underlying disease which causes it, rather than as a stand-alone disability.
- Evaluating mental health conditions based on a more robust and holistic approach that assesses how impactful the disability is to cognition, interpersonal relationships, task completion, life activities and self-care. Additionally, the proposed evaluation criteria include a 10% minimum evaluation for having one or more service-connected mental health conditions and will no longer require “total occupational and social impairment” to attain a 100% evaluation.

No change to a veteran’s current rating would occur due to these proposed changes. If the proposed changes are finalized, veterans who currently receive compensation for a service-connected condition can apply for increased compensation, but no reductions shall be made unless an improvement in the veteran’s disability is shown to have occurred.

The public has 60 days to provide comments to the VA regarding the two proposed updates via the Federal Register notices located [here](#).

CONGRESSMAN JOHNSON VISITS SDDVA AND HONORS VIETNAM VETERANS

This week U.S. Congressman Dusty Johnson stopped by the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs office to visit with Secretary Greg Whitlock about issues relating to veterans and their families.

Later that afternoon, Congressman Johnson presented lapel pins to Vietnam Veterans from around the Pierre area. Johnson's recognition is part of the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War commemoration.



STATE VETERANS HOME

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs is so thankful for all the partners that continue to support our residents at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. Our partners are from every corner of the state and provide so many gifts and contributions throughout the year.

Linda Kane from Lusk, Wyoming brought two beautiful lap blankets that she made for our veterans. Linda belongs to the Wyoming Homemakers Club and she chose our Home for her projects.

A big shout out and thank you to the Hot Springs Family Dollar and their community partners who donated over 200 red and pink heart-shaped balloons for our residents and staff.

It is said that love is the strength and beauty that brings music to our souls. It is obvious that our partners believe in the importance of love.





Community
Action for
Veterans

GREETINGS TO ALL WOMEN WHO HAVE SERVED OR WHO ARE CURRENTLY SERVING IN THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES!

Please join us on Saturday, March 26th for a day created just for YOU!



The Stand Up for Women Veterans Wellness Retreat is **FREE** for all women who have Served or are currently Serving in the United States Armed Forces. The purpose of this event is to **strengthen** the **leadership, power, and voices** of military women through **peer support** and **connection to resources**. The event will be held at Saviors Lutheran Church (909 W. 33rd Street) in Sioux Falls from 8:30 am – 1:30 pm (CT).

The Keynote Speaker is none other than former Marine Lori Walsh, host and senior producer of *In the Moment*, South Dakota Public Broadcasting's news and culture radio broadcast!

There are four wellness-focused break out sessions, a resource fair, and a light lunch.

FREE CHILDCARE available for up to 40 children, ages 2-10 years of age.

MOTHER/CHILD breakout sessions for all ages hosted by Sanford Fit and Apple Tree Children's Center.

SNACKS for all children's activities prepared by the VFW Auxiliary Post 628, and **PLAY KITS** provided by The Toy Lending Library for childcare activities.

REGISTER TODAY!

VENDOR REGISTRATION IS ALSO AVAILABLE AT THIS LINK!

Nonprofits-\$15

Businesses-\$50

www.eventbrite.com/e/stand-up-for-women-veterans-registration-171294104277



[Stand Up for Women Veterans Registration, Sat. Mar 26, 2022 at 8:30 AM | Eventbrite](#)

Free Drop-In Legal Clinic



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA



State Bar of *South Dakota*

Please join us either in-person or via Zoom:

Sioux Falls, South Dakota - Friday March 4th, 9AM - 4PM

- South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance
- 1600 W Russell St, Sioux Falls, SD 57104

Brookings, South Dakota - Saturday March 5th, 9AM - 4PM

- Brookings Veterans of Foreign Wars
- 520 Main Ave, Brookings, SD 57006

Please call ahead to reserve a time slot as space and availability is limited

To reserve an hour time slot, please contact the University of South Dakota Knudson School of Law Veterans Legal Education Group via phone or email.

Phone: 605-658-3530

Email: vleg@usd.edu

Join the Veterans Legal Education Group and the South Dakota Low Income Taxpayer Clinic for a FREE LEGAL CLINIC. Legal professionals, along with student attorneys, will be on site to address and support the Military community and their families with any legal questions and needs.

Assistance will be provided for military issues, tax issues, family law, criminal law, civil matters, etc. Wills and trusts can be created and executed on site.

FREE FOR ALL SERVICE MEMBERS, THEIR FAMILIES, AND VETERANS!

EVENT CONTACT:

USD Law Veterans Legal Education Group

Phone: 605-658-3530

Email: VLEG@usd.edu

SUPPORTED BY:

State Bar of South Dakota Veterans
Committee and Young Lawyers Section

Social Distancing guidelines will be followed and masks are required at all clinics. Masks and hand sanitizer will be available upon request.



Building Spiritual Strength

“Being in the group challenged me and gave me different perspectives that were really positive and encouraging from people who understood where I was at.”

Vet 30, USAF, Afghanistan

“The Building Spiritual Strengths group showed me that I don’t have to rely just on myself, it reminded me that there is something else out there to rely on.”

Vet 30, Army, Afghanistan.



This opportunity is being offered in collaboration by the Sioux Falls Vet Center and Sioux Falls VA Chaplain Service



The Sioux Falls Vet Center and the VA Chaplain Service are hosting a spiritual support group for Veterans who have survived difficult and/or traumatic experiences.

Building Spiritual Strength groups help Veterans reduce spiritual and psychological distress through use of meditative practices, such as prayer, and reading to aid in healing and readjustment.

Group will run from Tuesday, April 5th, 2022 –May 24, 2022. Group members must commit to meeting once a week for eight weeks . Group will be offered in person, however, we live in an ever changing world and it may become necessary to move group to virtual. Optimal group size is 4-6.

This group is open to Veterans of all faith traditions and spiritual backgrounds.

If you are interested in participating in this group, contact the Sioux Falls Vet Center.

Contact: Orlando George 605-330-4552

Space is limited so RSVP early.

Tuesdays, April 5th — May 24th
2:00 p.m.—4:00 p.m.
Sioux Falls Vet Center
5020 S. Broadband Ln
Sioux Falls, SD 57108

UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 18-20—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Oacoma
Feb 21—State Offices Closed
Feb 26-27—SD Vietnam Veterans & Era Reunion—Moose Lodge—Mitchell
Feb 27-Mar 2—DAV Mid Winter Conference—Washington, DC
Feb 27-Mar 3—National VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC
Mar 4—USD/SBASD Free Drop-In Legal Clinic—Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)
Mar 5—USD/SBASD Free Drop-In Legal Clinic—VFW—(520 Main Avenue)—Brookings—9:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)
Mar 10—Crossroads—Virtual Event—5:15 pm—8:00 pm (MT)
Mar 26—Stand Up for Women Veterans Retreat—Our Savior Lutheran Church (909) W. 33rd Street)—Sioux Falls—8:30 am—1:30 pm (CT)
Apr 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Apr 8-10—DAV of South Dakota State Convention—Rushmore Hotel and Suites (445 Mt. Rushmore Road)—Rapid City
Apr 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Military Heritage Alliance Building—Spirit of America Room—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
Jun 9-12—State VFW Convention—4-H Fairgrounds—Mitchell
Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride—SD Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls
Jun 16-19—State American Legion Conference—Watertown
Jul 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls
Aug 6-9—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL
Aug 14-19—Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention—Rapid City
Aug 15-17—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
Sep 1—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
Sep 1-5—South Dakota State Fair
Oct 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Dec 17—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue

Pierre, SD 57501

Phone: 605-773-8242

E-mail address: audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

